



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

Volume 12, Issue 3

The Healthy Journey

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877-677-9538

U.S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

What is telehealth?

Have you tried to schedule an appointment with a medical provider during COVID-19? Some providers have been offering “telehealth” appointments. Many people do not know what to expect from a telehealth appointment. If you are new to telehealth, and want to learn more about it, you are not alone.



Telehealth services are provided through phone calls, text messaging, and video conferencing. For example, your medical provider can meet with you from their office while you are at home. There are many types of video conferencing such as Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, and doxy.me. If you have a phone or internet access, you probably have everything you need for a telehealth appointment.

Telehealth has been widely used during COVID-19. This has allowed patients to stay home and get health care while social distancing. Patients do not need to travel to an appointment. Instead of sitting in a waiting room, patients can wait comfortably at home. Since it is convenient, telehealth will likely continue after the pandemic ends.

What kind of care can I receive through telehealth?

- Medical professionals use telehealth to deliver various types of care, such as:
 - General health and wellness visits
 - Prescriptions and refill requests
 - Mental health counseling
 - Dermatology (skin care) visits

- Nutrition counseling
- Some urgent care conditions such as cold or flu, sore throat, allergies, and sinus infections

Some medical visits require in-person visits. In person visits are required for surgery, lab tests, x-rays, and other physical examinations. If you are having a true medical emergency, call 911 right away – telehealth is not the best option for emergencies.

Does my provider offer telehealth?

Many healthcare providers offer telehealth. To find out if telehealth is offered by your provider, call their office and ask:

- Do you offer telehealth?
- Is a telehealth appointment appropriate for my health condition?
- How do I schedule a telehealth visit?
- Does my insurance cover a telehealth visit?
- Is there a copay?

Does my health insurance cover telehealth?

Your health insurance company can help you locate doctors who provide telehealth. You can find this information by calling the phone number on the back of your insurance card or by visiting your insurance company’s website. You can also visit <https://www.tech-healthdirectory.com/> to see a Digital Health Directory.

Use the links below to visit each insurers website for more information about telehealth during COVID-19:

- Medicare: <https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/telehealth>
- Aetna: <https://www.aetna.com/individuals-families/member-rights-resources/covid19/telemedicine.html>
- CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield: <https://individual.carefirst.com/individuals-families/about-us/coronavirus-telemedicine.page>

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- Cigna: <https://www.cigna.com/coronavirus/>
- UnitedHealthcare: <https://www.uhc.com/health-and-wellness/health-topics/covid-19/telehealth-options>

For Medicaid HealthChoice, use the links below to visit each insurer's website:

- Aetna Better Health of Maryland: <https://www.aetnabetterhealth.com/maryland/index.html>
- Amerigroup: <https://www.myamerigroup.com/md/home.html>
- Jai Medical Systems: <https://www.jaimedicalsystems.com/>
- Kaiser Permanente: <https://thrive.kaiserpermanente.org/>
- Maryland Physicians Care: <https://www.maryland-physicianscare.com/>
- MedStar Family Choice: <https://www.medstarfamily-choice.com/>
- Priority Partners: <https://www.ppmco.org/>
- United Healthcare Community Plan: <https://www.uhccommunityplan.com/>
- University of Maryland Health Partners: <https://www.umhealthpartners.com/>

You have some options if you do not have health insurance. Some clinics offer free or sliding-scale medical services for people who are uninsured.

Healthcare for the Homeless provides healthcare and supportive services to people with unstable or temporary living situations. These situations include living on the streets, living in shelters or transitional housing, or staying with friends, neighbors or relatives. Healthcare for the Homeless accepts Medicare and Medicaid, and accepts sliding scale payments if you are uninsured. If you are uninsured, Healthcare for the Homeless can help you sign up for health insurance through the Maryland Health Connection. To make an appointment, call 410-837-5533 (Baltimore City—Downtown), 443-703-1400 (Baltimore City—West Baltimore), or 443-703-1468 (Baltimore County). To learn more, visit <https://www.hchmd.org/clients>.



Is telehealth secure? Is my privacy protected?

Your healthcare provider will tell you what technology to use for your telehealth appointment. Examples are Skype, Zoom, doxy.me, and FaceTime. Your provider should not use Facebook or TikTok for a telehealth appointment because these apps are not private. Your provider must protect your privacy. Also, your provider

will ask for your consent to telehealth services and note it in your medical record.

How should I prepare for a telehealth visit?

It is important for patients to prepare for a telehealth appointment so their concerns can be addressed by a medical provider. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your telehealth appointment.

- Write down questions to ask your provider in advance. Examples of questions include:
 - How long will my symptoms last?
 - How do I know if I'm getting better?
 - Do I need lab or diagnostic tests? Where should I get these tests?
- Make a list of your symptoms – include when they started, the frequency, and the severity.
- Make a list of your current prescriptions. Note the dosage and how often you take your medication. Have your pharmacy's contact information on hand in case your provider needs to write you a new prescription.
- Wear loose clothing if you plan to show your provider something on your skin, such as a rash.
- Keep your photo ID and health insurance card handy. You might be asked to verify your identity.
- Find a well-lit, quiet place for your telehealth appointment. That way, you and your provider can see and hear each other.
- Make sure the device you are using (phone, tablet, or computer) is fully charged. Keep a charger nearby just in case your battery runs low.
- Make sure you are on time for your appointment.

What if I don't have computer or internet access?

If you do not have a computer or internet access, you can ask your provider if they offer telephone-only visits. It is important to keep in mind that some health services are not eligible for telephone-only telehealth. For example, physical and occupational therapies cannot be delivered over the phone.

Additional telephone resources

If you do not have health insurance, a computer, or internet access, there are other options you can use for free support. Here are some emergency hotlines and phone numbers for your healthcare needs.

- For help with mental health or substance use, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).
- For help if you have swallowed, splashed, or gotten stung by something, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222.

- If you have a question about COVID-19, please call the Maryland Department of Health at 1-877-463-3464.
- If you are interested in registering for a COVID-19 vaccine, call 855-MDGOVAX to reach the Maryland COVID-19 Vaccination Support Center.
- If you need help finding shelter or a place to eat, call 211.
- If you are having a medical emergency, please call 911.



Phone and internet assistance

If you are struggling to pay for phone or internet services, you may qualify for federal support through the Lifeline Program. Please visit <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>, call 1 (800) 234-9473, or email LifelineSupport@usac.org to see if you qualify for the Lifeline Program.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library has 21 branches in Baltimore City. Anyone who lives or owns property in Maryland is eligible for a free library card through the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Once you have a library card, you can enjoy all the services offered through the library. To sign up for a library card, visit any branch and a librarian can assist you. You can also apply here: <https://www.prattlibrary.org/library-cards/standard-library-card>.

Did you know that you can use free internet services through the Enoch Pratt Free Library? Here are resources available to library card holders:

Mobile Hotspots. A mobile hotspot allows you to connect your devices (phone, tablet, computer) to free Wi-Fi from your home. You can reserve 1 mobile hotspot per account for a 3-week loan period. You can auto-renew the hotspot up to 3 times if there are no holds. Mobile hotspot devices can be picked up and returned from any Enoch Pratt Sidewalk Service location. To learn more, visit <https://www.prattlibrary.org/books-and-more/computer-internet-devices/mobile-hotspots> or call (410) 396-5430.

Drive-In Wi-Fi. You do not need to enter a library branch to use the internet or connect to the library's Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi can be used outside of the Brooklyn, Edmondson Avenue, Forest Park, Herring Run, Northwood, Orleans Street, Patterson Park, and Waverly Enoch Pratt Library buildings. Social distancing is required if you use the library's Wi-Fi outside. For more information, visit <https://www.prattlibrary.org/services/drive-in-wi-fi> or call (410) 396-5430.

COVID-19 nutrition tips

By Dr Marie Kuczmariski

- For general health and immune system support in fighting COVID-19, eat a balanced diet comprised of whole grains, lean proteins, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and foods containing omega 3-fatty acids like fresh or canned salmon, sardines, mackerel, tuna, eggs, and soy milk.
- Don't skip fruits and vegetables! Remember to wash produce well. Fruits or vegetables increase dietary fiber, which aids digestion. Buying frozen or canned produce can keep produce handy for recipes. Canned produce has nutrient content similar to fresh produce!
- Stay hydrated. Lack of water can send a similar signal that you are hungry. Be sure you are drinking 6-8 glasses a day. Don't drink too much close to bedtime.
- Feeling stressed and the urge to stress snack? Notice your cravings, take a few deep breaths, and ask yourself if you're hungry or just passing the time. Try a soothing activity first instead of eating, perhaps listening to music can calm yourself.
- If you're staying at home with others, try to eat at least one meal together each day. It can help lessen feelings of isolation, and help you practice mindful eating.
- Have fun in the kitchen! Cooking together can help you connect with others and ease stress.
- Vitamin D may protect against COVID-19 in two ways. First, it may help boost our bodies' natural defense against viruses and bacteria. Second, it may prevent an inflammatory response, which has been shown to contribute to severe illness in some people with COVID-19. A daily vitamin D supplement of 1000 or 2000 IU per day is likely safe for most adults. A vitamin D supplement can also help if you are not exposed to enough sunshine or if you are not eating food sources of Vitamin D (mackerel, salmon, tuna, fortified dairy products, and soy milk).

A new way to contact us

Did you know that HANDLS has an email address? Email is a great way to keep in touch with our team. If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.